

# **Suzuki Piano Method**

## **Reconciliation of Published Editions, Book 1**

**Written by Cathy Williams Hargrave**  
**Rowlett, Texas, USA**

**Compiled by Christine Mathews**

**Web Edited by Kenneth Wilburn**  
**Greenville, NC, USA**

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### **Dr. Haruko Kataoka**

Dr. Haruko Kataoka is the co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method. Born in Tokyo in 1927, she began the study of piano at the age of six with the late Yoshimune Hirata. Graduating from Sacred Heart Girls' High School in Tokyo in 1945, she continued piano studies with Haruko Fujita. Dr. Kataoka moved to Matsumoto City in 1955 to serve as accompanist in Dr. Shinichi Suzuki's Talent Education Institute, where she began to research piano pedagogy based upon Dr. Suzuki's methods of teaching violin. Thereafter, having developed the repertoire for the Suzuki Piano Method, she has served as Director of the Piano Department at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, where she continues to teach students and to train teachers from Japan and from around the world. For over a decade, she has directed "Ten Piano Concerts" in Matsumoto every 18 months, which have become international events since 1993, with the inclusion of students from other countries.

Beginning in 1972, when she attended the Suzuki Institute at Stevens Point, Wisconsin as a teacher trainer, Dr. Kataoka has traveled abroad for several weeks each year to conduct international workshops at universities and other centers in North America, Europe and Australia as well as in Japan and other Asian countries. Dr. Kataoka was awarded the Matsumoto City Arts and Culture Award in 1986 and was granted an honorary doctorate in music from the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky in 1990.

Dr. Kataoka's publications in English include *My Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School* (Birch Tree Group, Ltd., 1985), *My Thoughts on Piano Technique* (Birch Tree Group, Ltd., 1988) and *Sensibility and Education* (Piano Basics, Inc., 1993).

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## Introduction

In the *Suzuki Piano Method*, we now have several different editions of the repertoire and the sequence in which it is to be presented. The repertoire and sequence were originally decided upon by three teachers, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, Dr. Haruko Kataoka, and Mrs. Shizuko Suzuki.

Naturally, everyone knows Dr. Shinichi Suzuki was the genius behind the creation of the Suzuki Philosophy and the *Suzuki Violin Method*. However, not everyone knows what role Dr. Suzuki, Dr. Kataoka, and Mrs. Shizuko Suzuki played in the formation of the *Suzuki Piano Method*. A clear understanding of the editions of the Suzuki repertoire is not possible without this information.

Mrs. Shizuko Suzuki was Dr. Suzuki's sister-in-law. When Dr. Suzuki first had the idea to adapt the *Suzuki Violin Method* to the piano, Mrs. Suzuki, a pianist, was the logical choice. Until Dr. Suzuki's death, Mrs. Suzuki's teaching was directly based upon his advice about piano teaching and technique. She did not claim to be the type of teacher who researches ideas and often deferred to Dr. Kataoka at conferences and teaching sessions when such topics arose (as witnessed by this author).

Dr. Kataoka's first exposure to the Suzuki Method began as an accompanist for Dr. Suzuki's violin students. For ten years she carefully observed Dr. Suzuki's teaching and researched ideas for the same type of piano methodology. Eventually, she formed a class of students and became the teacher-trainer at Dr. Suzuki's school, The Talent Education Institute, in Matsumoto. She continues teaching with a researching spirit and has helped teachers all over the world become better teachers and pianists.

The first edition of the *Suzuki Piano Method* was published in Japan by Zen-On. A few years later Summy-Birchard obtained all publishing rights for every country outside Japan. The most recent editions for countries outside of Japan are published by Warner Brothers.

Each edition has its own problems and discrepancies. The biggest problem is in regard to fingerings; however, all three editions have mistakes in other areas as well. As a result, Suzuki piano teachers are more confused than ever. This problem is the most obvious during workshops. Clinicians see so many different fingerings now that it is impossible to know whether the student is playing correctly or not. Fingerings for the beginner and intermediate level student are not a matter of personal taste; yet, teachers and students have become quite creative with fingering selections and beginners are not always learning basic fingering patterns.

The purpose of this new column will be to discuss some differences in these editions from a pedagogical standpoint and especially to clarify what fingering Dr. Kataoka teaches in these pieces. The column will begin with Volume I and progress through Volume 7. Whenever

possible, especially for the upper-level books, facsimiles of original manuscripts and reliable Urtext editions will be consulted.

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## A Guide for Teachers and Parents

The beginning of Volume 1 in the Zen-On and Summy-Birchard editions contain an abundance of unnecessary finger exercises. These were intended by someone to be preparatory exercises for *The Twinkle Variations* and are printed for the Right Hand alone, Left Hand alone, and then Hands Together. For a fact, Dr. Kataoka has not done these exercises with her students for at least 28 years and probably never did. The Warner Brothers edition correctly deleted these exercises.

### *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star Variations* by Shinichi Suzuki

The biggest confusion in the *Suzuki Piano Method* has been caused by the way *The Twinkle Variations* were printed in the Zen-On and Summy-Birchard editions. These books show them to be played Hands Together. Dr. Kataoka has stated many times during past years that she never taught the *Twinkles* Hands Together because it would lead to poor technique and tone production. The Warner Brothers edition correctly prints the *Twinkles* as pieces to be played Hands Separately.

The next problem is that in all three editions the fingerings are incorrect. All three editions list the fingerings for the Right Hand as:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
1 4 5 4 4 3 2 1 5 4 3 2...

The Warner Brothers edition also lists an optional fingering:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
1 4 5 4 3 2 1 1 5 4 3 2...

The fingerings printed in all three editions for the Left Hand *Twinkles* are:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
5 2 1 2 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4...

The optional fingering in the Warner Brothers edition is:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
5 2 1 2 3 4 5 5 1 2 3 4...

None of these fingerings have been used by Dr. Kataoka for a very long time, if ever. For a fact, she has not been seen using the fingerings listed above with her own students for at

least 28 years.

Teachers may wonder why these fingerings are unacceptable. Children can learn to remember anything, so why would this be an issue? It is an issue because the fingerings are inconsistent each time *Sol* is played in the piece. The students have to practice an extra amount simply to remember when *Sol* should be played by the Right Hand's finger 5 or 4, or the Left Hand's finger 2 or 1, and when to play the Right Hand's finger 4 (or Left Hand's finger 2) two times in a row. The inconsistency of these fingerings interrupts and delays the actual goal of teaching secure technique and tone production.

The fingerings Dr. Kataoka teaches consistently use the same finger on *Sol* which avoids confusion by the student or parent. The Right Hand fingerings are:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
1 4 5 4 3 2 1 1 4 3 2 1...

The Left Hand fingerings are:

Do Sol La Sol Fa Mi Re Do Sol Fa Mi Re  
5 2 1 2 3 4 5 5 2 3 4 5...

The editions of Volume 1 are relatively problem-free once *The Twinkle Variations* have been considered; however, a few places in each edition create a cause for concern.

The most obvious difference between all three editions is the order of pieces following *The Twinkle Variations*.

Piece # in Book	Zen-On	Summy-Birchard	Warner Bros.
#2	<i>Lightly Row</i> (in unison)	<i>Lightly Row</i> (in unison)	<i>Honey Bee</i> (in unison)
#3	<i>Honey Bee</i> (in unison)	<i>Honey Bee</i> (in unison)	<i>Cuckoo</i> (w/acc.)
#4	<i>Cuckoo</i> (in unison)	<i>Cuckoo</i> (w/acc.)	<i>Lightly Row</i> (w/acc.)
#5	<i>Cuckoo</i> (w/acc.)	<i>Lightly Row</i> (w/acc.)	<i>Fr. Children's Song</i>
#6	<i>Lightly Row</i> (w/acc.)	<i>Fr. Children's Song</i>	<i>London Bridge</i>

Beginners first learn the right hand melody of these pieces and add the left hand accompaniments later; therefore, the order does not seem to be a major concern. However, all three editions indicate that *Lightly Row* and *Honeybee* are played hands together in unison. Zen-On even has a *Cuckoo* in unison and another with an accompaniment. Dr. Kataoka does not ask her students to play the melody of these three pieces hands together.

She instructs teachers to avoid asking beginners to play in unison because it hinders the development of skillful technique and tone production.

It is known that Dr. Suzuki thought beginning piano students would benefit from learning melodies with the left hand in order to develop an ability equal to that of the right hand. This may be one reason *The Twinkle Variations*, *Honeybee*, *Lightly Row*, and *Cuckoo* were printed the way they are. Dr. Suzuki later asked Zen-On to publish yet another edition of Volume 1 in which the left hand plays the melody of each piece in the bass while the right hand plays the accompaniment in the treble! In Japan, this book is still in print.

Dr. Kataoka asks students to learn the melodies of *Honeybee*, *Cuckoo* and *Lightly Row* in the left hand by itself as a prelude to the study of accompaniments. In lessons, she accompanies them by playing the accompaniment in the right hand. She also teaches the LH accompaniment for *Honeybee*, which appears in none of these editions. It is the same as the one on her recording and is published in *Methode Rose*, by Ernest Van de Velde (Tokyo, Ongaku No Tomo Sha, 1950) on page 17 under the French title *Petite abeille bourdonne* in the key of G. It is a simple accompaniment for students to learn by ear. *Allegretto 2* is the first piece in the Suzuki repertoire which is really meant to be played in unison. By the time students are ready to play it hands together, they have carefully studied each hand separately, attained a certain level of technical development, and are ready to raise that level.

### ***London Bridge***

The fingering in the right hand of measures 3 and 7 deserves careful consideration. The Zen-On and Summy-Birchard editions have finger 1 playing Re in measure 3 and finger 2 on Re in measure 7. The Warner Bros. edition indicates that Re should be played each time with finger 1. In theory, the Warner Bros. edition seems logical because finger 1 consistently plays the same note. But actually, when playing hands together, students experience more confusion from the fingering of the Warner Bros. edition than the Zen-On/Summy-Birchard fingering. Dr. Kataoka teaches the Zen-On fingering and forewarns the parents to conscientiously help their children learn and drill the correct fingering.

### ***Christmas-Day Secrets***

The Zen-On and Summy-Birchard editions agree on fingerings but the Warner Bros. edition shows different fingerings in the right hand of measure 11 and 15. Dr. Kataoka teaches the fingerings in the Zen-On/Summy-Birchard editions, which are 5 2 1 2, followed by 1 3 1 3.

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Please send corrections to [Kenneth Wilburn](#), Web Editor

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